

Provence

Background

- Covers 125 miles of coastline along the Mediterranean between the Rhône River to the west and the Côte d'Azur on the east¹
- The oldest place for viticulture in all of France and a leader in organic viticulture
- Ancient Greeks were the first to make wine here; other cultures that influenced winemaking include the Romans, Gauls, Catalans and Savoyards who introduced Greek, Italian, French and Spanish grapes to the region
- The Romans called it "*provincia nostra*" and was their first province outside of Italy
- No vineyard is more than 25 miles from the ocean
- 9 AOPs total with 35 permitted varieties
- Rosé is the main wine style and accounts for over 80% of production

History

- Greeks from Asia Minor established the prosperous port city of Massalia in 600 BCE
 - Brought vines with them, although early vineyards may have been from indigenous vines
 - Pink wine from the area became famous throughout the Mediterranean
- Romans arrived in 125 BCE and establish Aix-en-Provence as the capital and built roads, irrigation systems and underground cellars to benefit viticulture
- After the fall of the Roman Empire, Provence was occupied by Visigoths and Ostrogoths, as well as by Catalans and Moors
- It was made a part of France in 1481 but still retains its own unique identity
- First guests to holiday here were aristocrats from Northern Europe beginning in the 18th century
- Algerian French settled here after 1962 and raised the quality of many vineyards

Climate

- Mediterranean climate with mild winters and little rainfall
- More than 3,000 hours of sunlight per year (double the amount needed to ripen grapes)
- Mistral wind impacts viticulture in the same way as in the Rhone
 - Violent storms can arrive in spring and fall, leading to some vintage variation
 - South-facing vineyards provide protection; however, grapes can overripen in such a warm climate
- Soils vary widely and include limestone, shale, schist, quartz, clay and sandstone
 - The western countryside is limestone, where the land was covered in ancient times by a warm, shallow sea.
 - The eastern area has mostly crystalline schist (granite) and some volcanic soil
- Garrigue is the southern French word to describe dry, herb-strewn scrubland over limestone soils and it plays a large role in the character of the wines here

¹ In the French départements of Bouches-du-Rhône, Vaucluse, Alpes-de-Haute-Provence, and Var.

Grapes

- Whites

- Vermentino (“Rolle”)
 - Ancient grape of the Mediterranean
 - Member of the Muscat family that originated in Liguria
 - Known for citrus, pear, almond and floral aromas
 - Primary white grape in Bellet and Corsica
- Clairette
 - Native grape also found in the Rhône Valley
 - Means “light one”
 - The base for many sparkling wines of the region with aromas of white flowers, hazelnut and apricot
 - Its low acidity and high alcohol has led it to be disfavored in the modern era
- Bourboulenc
 - Ancient variety that is used mainly as a blending grape
 - Adds notes of citrus, smoke, and minerality
 - A late-ripening variety that is easy to cultivate
 - Maintains acidity even in warm climes
- Ugni Blanc
 - A native Italian grape grown throughout Italy and France
 - A vigorous growing vine that contributes acidity and stone fruit notes to blends
- Pigneroi
 - Ancient grape with low yields
 - Today grown only in Bellet
- Pascal Blanc
 - An ancient and almost extinct variety
 - Susceptible to fungus and disease
 - Adds citrus, green herb and nutty flavors
 - Mainly used for blending in Cassis
- Terret Blanc
 - Ancient native variety widely used to make Vermouth
 - Highly prone to mutation
 - Extremely high yielding
 - Makes light, fresh wines with subtle fruit and floral aromas
- Marsanne
- Grenache Blanc
- Sémillon
- Muscat
- Sauvignon Blanc

- **Reds**

- Cinsault
 - One of the oldest native grapes of Provence
 - Produces a soft wine that is low in tannins
 - Ripens well even in drought conditions
 - As a rosé, it takes on brighter aromatics of raspberry, white peach, tea leaf and rose
- Carignan
 - Late-ripening variety native to Sardinia
 - Prefers warm climates to express high tannins, acids and color
 - As a single variety wine it is peppery and savory
 - Typically grown as bush vines on steep hillsides
 - Susceptible to powdery mildew and can require extensive spraying
 - Disfavored in France in the 1980s due to overproduction
- Tibouren
 - Native to Provence and only grown here
 - Used mainly used for producing full-bodied rosé wines with an earthy bouquet
 - Beneficial as a blending partner with Grenache and Cinsault
 - Calitor²
 - Almost extinct in Provence
 - Known for high yields and can lack acidity
- Mourvèdre
- Syrah
- Cabernet Sauvignon

Wine Styles

- Dry white, red and rosé

Wine Law

- Provence is the only wine region other than Bordeaux that has a ranking for wine estates called *Crus Classés* based on the estates' history and reputation for quality winemaking (18 total today)³

² Calitor and Barbaroux (Barbarossa in Corsica) are being actively phased out, to be replaced by Grenache, Syrah, and Cabernet Sauvignon,

³ Château L'Aumérade, Château de Brégançon, Clos Cibonne, Château de la Clapière, Domaine de la Croix, Château du Galoupet, Domaine du JAs d'Esclans, Château de Mauvanne, Château Minuty, Clos Mireille, Domaine du Noyer, Domaine du Rimauresq, Château Roubine, Château Sainte Marguerite, Château de Saint Martin, Château de Saint Maur, Château Sainte Roseline, Château de Selle.

Regions

- Côtes de Provence
 - Largest wine region that covers 85 noncontiguous areas in the eastern region between Aix, Toulon and Frejus
 - Close to 50,000 acres of vineyards with widely varying quality
 - Over 70% of all regional wine production is here, with rosé accounting for more than 80% of production
 - Red is around 15% and white is around 5%
 - Rosé is typically pale pink with aromas of citrus, red fruit, and dried herbs
 - Main grape varieties are Carignan, Cinsault, Grenache, Mourvèdre and Tibouren
 - 60% of the blend must be Grenache, Cinsault, Mourvèdre or Tibouren
 - No more than 40% can be Carignan
 - 20% of the rosé must be blended from wine produced using the saignée method
 - Subregions⁴ for red and rosé wines only:
 - Frejus
 - Located on the eastern side of Provence, halfway between Toulon and Nice
 - Less than 620 acres
 - Mostly rosé wine from Grenache, Cinsault, Mourvèdre, Cinsault and Tibouren
 - Sainte-Victoire
 - 80% rosé
 - Named after the Montagne Sainte Victoire and its visible limestone soils
 - Grenache, Cinsault, Mourvèdre and Cinsault are key grapes
 - Minor grapes include Carignan, Tibouren, Cabernet Sauvignon and Semillon
 - La Londe
 - 75% is rosé from Cinsault and Grenache
 - Best sites are on southeast facing slopes of the Massif des Maurres hills
 - Pierrefeu
 - Western part of the appellation with Massif des Maures to the south and the central Var department to the north
 - Principal grapes are Grenache, Cinsault, Mourvèdre, Cabernet Sauvignon and Carignan for red wines
 - These are also used for rosé, along with Tibouren

⁴ These smaller regions, along with Bandol and Cassis, make up only around 15% of total annual output

- Coteaux d'Aix-en-Provence⁵
 - Second largest wine region covering over 50 communes in the west and northwest, including Aix-en-Provence
 - Most vineyards here have limestone
 - A pocket of cool climate vineyards exists near the limestone ridge of Montagne Sainte-Victoire
 - Major grapes are Grenache, Cinsault, Mourvèdre, Syrah, Counoise, Carignan and Cabernet Sauvignon
 - Barbaroux and Calitor are prohibited
 - White grapes include Rolle, Bourboulenc, Clairette, Grenache Blanc, Ugni Blanc, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Semillon
 - 60% red wine, 35% rosé and 5% white
 - Reds are deep and complex with aromatic intensity
 - Rosé is fruity with red fruit, peach and citrus flavors
 - Whites are pale yellow with fresh acidity and citrus notes
 - Subregion is Les Baux-de-Provence
 - Very hot climate in a valley called the “Val d’Enfer”
 - Makes reds and rosé
 - First AOP to require all vineyards to be biodynamic
- Coteaux Varois en Provence
 - Aka the “Heart of Provence”
 - Covers the central region in the Var department and includes 28 communes north of Toulon
 - Sheltered by the Sainte-Baume mountains to the north
 - 22 mile chain of hills behind the Mediterranean coastline
 - Reach almost 4,000 feet above sea level
 - Massif des Marues to the southeast also provide cooling properties to the vineyards here⁶
 - Main grapes are Grenache, Cinsault, Mourvèdre, Syrah and Carignan
 - 60% is rosé, around 30% is red and a small amount of white wine is made
 - Red wines are full-bodied with black fruit, spice and leather aromas
 - Rosé is pale salmon or light pink with stone fruit, red fruit and exotic fruit aromas
 - White wines are delicate with fesh floral and citrus notes
- Bandol
 - Near the coast east of Marseille and Cassis, includes 8 communes
 - The hillside vineyards form a natural amphitheater where the terraces are supported by walls made of river stone called *restanques*
 - Silicon and limestone soils
 - Very low yields

⁵ The Côtes du Luberon in the nearby Vaucluse département is sometimes included due to its similarity in style to Provence, but is officially part of the Rhône Valley appellation. The Ventoux appellation, also to the north, is treated the same way.

⁶ The cooler climate has brought winemakers such as Louis Latour to experiment with Pinot Noir plantings

- Terraced vineyards
 - Mostly red and rosé wines from Mourvèdre
 - Mourvèdre is the dominant variety and makes a richly flavored red wine
 - Key is warm growing conditions thanks to protection from cold north winds by nearby coastal mountain ranges
 - Must comprise 50% of the blend for reds and rosé
 - Reds must be aged at least 18 months in oak
 - Grenache is the other main red grape, planted mostly on cooler, north-facing slopes as a hedge against over-ripening
 - Others include Cinsault, Carignan and Syrah
 - Whites from Clairette, Bourboulenc, Ugni Blanc, and small amounts of Marsanne and Vermentino
- Cassis
 - Located on the coast between Marseilles and Bandol surrounded by vineyards and garrigue
 - Like Bandol, has numerous mesoclimates from from coastal mountain ranges and cliffs
 - Covers reds, whites, and rosé
 - Over 75% production is white wine
 - Marsanne and Clairette are the two dominant grapes in the blends
 - Additional varieties include Bourboulenc⁷, Pascal Blanc, Terret Blanc, Sauvignon Blanc, and Ugni Blanc
 - Style is for low acid, herbaceous and full-bodied whites
 - Well-drained, clay-limestone based soils serve as the base for terraced vineyards
 - Most of production is consumed locally
- Bellet
 - Small area near Nice and the French Riviera known for reds, whites, and rosé
 - Significant Italian influence
 - A standout among generic Provencal wines
 - Vermentino⁸ is a major grape here and makes up 60% of production
 - Other local white grapes include Blanqueiron, Bourboulenc, Roussanne and Clairette and Ugni Blanc
 - Ugni Blanc is known as “Roussan” here
 - Chardonnay and Muscat may be used in white wines
 - Red grapes include Braquet and Fuella Nera, as well as Cinsault and Grenache
 - Braquet may be the same variety as Brachetto from the Piedmont
 - Fuella Nera is the same as Folle Noir (aka Jurancon Noir)
- Pierrevert (formerly known as Coteaux de Pierrevert)
 - Northeastern section of region with a cooler climate due to alpine foothills
 - Red, white and rosé wines from Grenache, Syrah, Cinsault, Clairette and Rolle
 - Mostly local consumption

⁷ Doucillon Blanc is the local name for this grape.

⁸ This area typically uses the Italian name for the grape on its labels (not Rolle as is the case elsewhere in Provence).

- Palette
 - Smallest region in Provence
 - North-facing slopes of Montaigner provide a cooling effect, allowing for slow maturation of grapes
 - 25 grape varieties
 - Most vineyards are owned by Chateau Simone
 - Soils are mainly limestone
 - Main grapes are Cinsault, Grenache, Mourvèdre and Ugni Blanc

Corsica

Background

- Less than 60 miles from Italy and about 100 miles southeast of France
- Greeks from Asia Minor brought the vine around 600 BCE, 18th century the island comes under control of France
- 9 AOPs today, although over 2/3 of production (and most exports) carry the IGP designation “Vin de Pays de l’île de Beauté”
- The main grapes are Italian in origin and over 30 varieties are permitted

History

- Greeks settled the island and began viticulture about 2,600 years ago
- Islamic rule beginning in 7th century
- Middle ages was ruled by Pisa and Genoa; this may be when Sangiovese was introduced (now Nielluccio)
- Strict laws governed harvesting and winemaking
- The most sought after wines were in the “Greek style” from the Cap Corse region
- 1768 - Corsica became French
- 1769 - Napoleon born in Ajaccio to a family of winemakers
- Under Napoleon’s rule Corsica could export wine duty free throughout the French empire
- Efforts to improve the quality of wine began in the 19th century with widespread planting of Sciacarello and infrastructure; unfortunately phylloxera hit and many Corsicans emigrated to other countries
- The wine industry saw an influx of talent after the Algerian war of Independence, increasing vineyard space by 400%
- By the 1980s the EU sponsored a vine pull to replant with higher quality grapes, limit yields and introduced new winemaking technology

Climate

- Most mountainous island in the Med creating numerous mesoclimates
 - Main spine of the mountains runs from Monacia d’Aullene, just east of Sartene, to the northwest corner of the island near Calvi
 - Undulating valleys create ideal microclimates
- Average elevation is 1,000 feet above sea level
- Little rain during harvest
- Over 2,500 hours of sunshine a year
- Numerous soil types
 - Schist in the Cap Corse peninsula
 - Limestone in the Patrimonio region
 - Granite along the west coast
 - Marly sand on the east coast between the cities of Solenzara and Bastia
- Prevailing winds, including the mistral, are beneficial in regulating temps and reducing the risk of mildew

Grapes

- **Whites**
 - Vermentino/Rolle
 - Ugni Blanc/Rossola
 - Bianco Gentile
 - Codivarta
 - Genovese
- **Reds**
 - Sangiovese/Nielluccio
 - Sciacarello
 - Barbarossa
 - Carignan
 - Cinsault
 - Carcajolo Nero
 - Grenache
 - Mourvedre
 - Pinot Noir
 - Tempranillo

Wine Styles

- Rosé is typically saignée with malo suppressed
- Reds spend some time in oak
- White rarely have oak
- Vin doux naturel style for sweet wine

Wine Law

- The majority of wines are “Ile de Beaute” IGP
- Vin de Corse AOP covers the entire island
 - 45% of all wine produced is this designation
 - Red and Rosé must include at least 50% Nielluccio, Sciacarello or Grenache and no more than 50% combined of Barbarossa, Carignan, Cinsault, Mourvedre, Syrah and Vermentino
 - Whites are primarily Vermentino
 - Subregions are Vin de Corse-Coteaux du Cap Corse, Vin de Corse-Calvi, Vin de Corse-Figari, Vin de Corse-Porto Vecchio and Vin de Corse-Sartene
- Muscat du Cap Corse AOP includes the vin doux naturel wines produced in the northern peninsular tip of the island made from Muscat and Aleatico

Regions

- Patrimonio
 - Northern coast west of Bastia
 - First to receive AOP status
 - Nielluccio is the main grape used in the majority of red and rosé
 - White wine from Vermentino

- Minor grapes include Grenache, Sciacarello
- Ajaccio
 - Vineyards surrounding southwestern coastal town of Ajaccio
 - Red and rosé primarily from Sciacarello
 - Reds must contain at least 40% Sciacarello
 - Other permitted varieties are Grenache, Cinsault and Carignan
 - The style is spicy and bold
 - Whites are often blends of Ugni Blanc and Vermentino
- Vin de Corse-Calvi
 - Around northwestern coastal town of Calvi north of Ajaccio
 - Mountainous area
 - Red and rosé must follow the Vin de Corse regulations
 - Whites must be at least 75% Vermentino, with Ugni Blanc permitted in the blend
- Vin de Corse Coteaux du Cap Corse
 - Covers vineyards in the Cap Corse peninsula that extends into the Ligurian sea
 - More than half of production is rosé
- Vin de Corse Figari
 - Covers villages in the southern tip of the island
 - Relatively flat
 - Mostly granite soils, with limestone and sand along the coastline
 - More than half of production is rosé
- Vin de Corse Porto-Vecchio
 - Southeast corner
 - Coastal foothills
 - Granite soils
 - More than half of production is rosé
- Vin de Corse Sartene
 - Southwest region
 - Reds are robust and the whites are light and aromatic